December 2006

Windows into another time

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

Depot Town Rag

Volume 21, Number 9

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Old ways still work

Shop, eat, spend the day in the neighborhood—that's still a popular ethic in this old commercial district. Park in one of the many convenient lots or along the street and stroll the district, happily window-shopping all along the way. That's how this stretch of buildings was designed in the nineteenth century and it still works.

Early city planners built the street wider than most so teams of horses could turn a wagon around and, even though the sidewalks have been widened in recent years, autos are still not prohibited from making U-turns in mid-block. It's a concept not repeated often enough and maybe that's why so many people do their shopping by mail or through the Internet today.

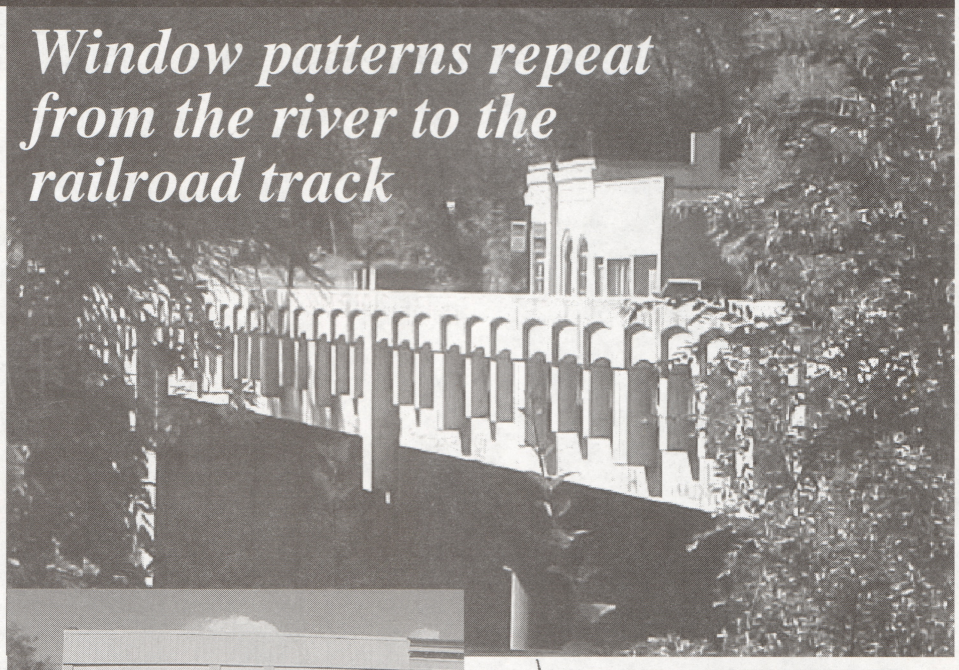
Down in Ypsi's Depot Town, however, people are still turning out to peer in shop windows, and see what's new—or old.

Shop keepers will greet you at the door and actually make eye contact with you. Somehow, they don't seem to feel it necessary to wear name tags with snappy slogans exclaiming how happy they are to serve you. They show it with genuine sincerity instead.

A nice reflection on our time

It's an old trick seen in many private eye movies: act like you're looking in the shop window, but concentrate on the reflection across the street. The window at Creation Station captures shoppers' attention both inside and outside.

Window patterns repeat from the river to the railroad track



Architect Denis Schmiedeke's design for the ballustrade of the 1984 Cross Street Bridge reflects the same visual pattern as the rows of Commercial Italianate windows seen on EMU/AAUP (Eastern Michigan University/American Association of Univeristy Professors), City Body Shop, and other façades on the block. Their rhythym and regularity march up and down East Cross Street. The EMU/AAUP space in Hansen's building was once the ballroom for the Fraternal Order of Eagles. Across the CS Bridge stands John Pappas's sculpture studio—our first City Hall/Jail.

A refuge from the malls' "War on Christmas"

Those outlying shopping "centers" in former cornfields around town have windows too, but who would know? Folks still stroll the sidewalks in older neighborhoods like Depot Town and gaze into the windows to see what's being featured in these shops this month. Window shopping continues to be a popular pastime in Ypsilanti.

This month shopkeepers will compete on December 2 for the honor of "best dressed display window" in their annual effort to bring folks into their friendly shops and avoid the Musak-frenzy of Big Box stores passing themselves off as tradtional shopping districts.

Some of the Corporate Mall Rats started their Christmas holiday hype right after the Fourth of July, but Depot Town's merchants adhere to an older tradition of offering Christmas specials in the month of December. It's a radical concept but, somehow, it still seems to work in communities where people either know each other—or at least act like they know each other. Either way, it's a tradition worth perpetuating.

Down in Depot Town, shoppers are afraid that, if they don't stop and talk to other shoppers they encounter on the street, people might think they're from Ann Arbor.

Shops' windows show off our creativity

Many of the display windows in Depot Town's 19th century buildings still show products to best advantage in today's modern market. Cast iron columns, transom windows, narrow sidelights, and vast expanses of plate glass lend themselves to artful and helpful displays of the commodities offered within.

***Above:** Dennis's Music, The Cheeky Monkey, Nelson Amos Studio, and World of Rocks carry the window dressing tradition into a new age.*

Shop windows up and down the street are set for the holiday season as shoppers make preparations for the holidays

The elegant little window at Nelson Amos Studio draws spectators as they approach the entrance to Frog Island Park

Look in the window at World of Rocks (south on Huron Street) and you'll find Gail Kornbluth organizing beads and beading tools, findings, classes and books. Look for rocks: tumbled, raw, minerals, tools and tumblers. Kids can open their own geodes, find stickers and dinosaur books; Petoskeys, copper, arrowheads, meteorites, and other Michigan minerals. Gail's "World" has salt lamps, candles, chimes, bookends, fossils, gem spheres, figurines, and agates. Gift certificates for these creative and natural gifts are also available.

News from up the street:

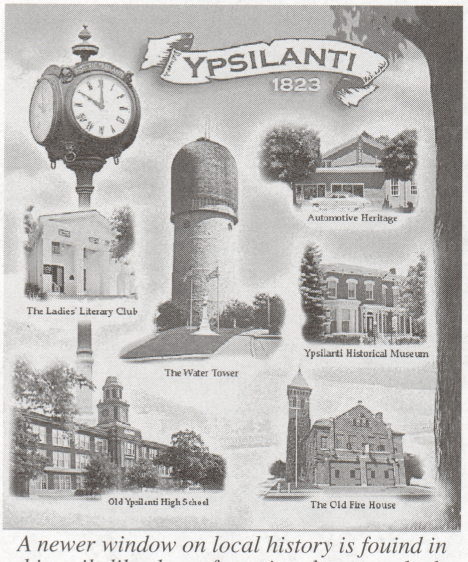
Connect

Plumbers for the Ypsilanti Historical Society capped off the sewer drain for the Huron Street Museum's carriage house last month. They closed what may have been the oldest septic tank in the city. Now that the Society has bought the property from the City of Ypsilanti, the City fully expects it to be brought up to meet the current building codes.

Disconnect

Eastern Michigan University is moving forward with plans to close a block of College Place and Forest Avenue around Pease Auditorium. While some describe the design as "welcoming" visitors to the campus from town, others say it will further remove the campus from the adjacent city neighborhoods. 60 current parking spaces could be lost in the project but there's a new lot with 250 parking spaces for visitors behind the new Student Center on the far corner of the campus.

"Best Dressed Window" award ceremony at Quinn's Saturday, 8 p.m. December 2



A newer window on local history is fouind in this quilt-like throw featuring the town clock, Ladies' Literary Club, Water Tower, Old High School, Automobile Museum, Ypsilanti Historical Museum, and the Old Fire Hall. (Available at Quinn's Essentials, $50)

Ad Art
concepts ♦ designs ♦ screenprinting ♦ ad specialties
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• e-mail: dianebrownadart@aol.com • FAX: (517) 592-3585

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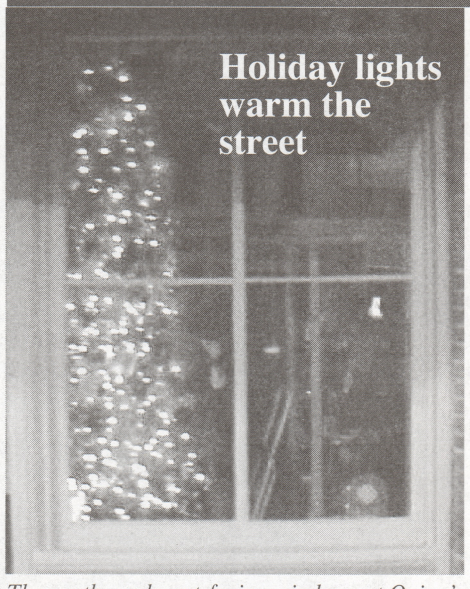
Window-shopping still popular in traditional neighborhoods



The south- and west-facing windows at Quinn's Essentials are surmounted by stained glass panels from the Michigan Territory's "first safe bank." The National Bank of Ypsilanti started out here. That local enterprise became National Bank of Detroit, then Bank One, and is now known as Chase (there is no indication of banking in their newest name, but they seem to be doing well without it).

Retail spill-over suspected

Shoppers may have noticed the Big Holiday Promotions at the strip malls, because business picked up down here as soon as the old-fashioned slam-bang screen doors were removed from Depot Town shops this fall. The district's antique stores, specialty shops, and gift-oriented businesses find the Christmas holidays to be almost as big a shopping event as August's annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.

"If we had that kind of traffic down here every day of the year," observed one shopkeeper, "I'd have to hire a more staff, put up traffic signs, and maybe even retire earlier than I had planned."

Smart shoppers have also noted that, when they park in any of the more than 216 public parking spaces in the neighborhood, the farthest away parking space is closer than they could ever find in the vast reaches of asphalt at any consumer mall out on the highway.

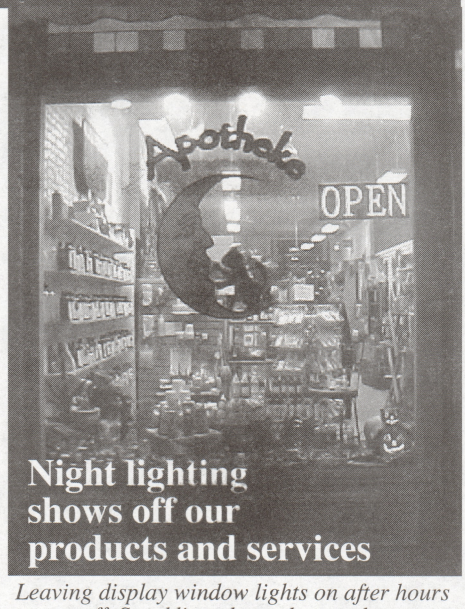
Silver (railroad) Bells

[with some local modifications]

Strings of street lights
Even stop lights
Blink a bright red and green
As the shoppers rush home
with their treasures
Hear the snow crunch
See the kids bunch
This is Santa's big scene
And above all this bustle you'll hear:
Railroad bells, railroad bells
It's Christmas time at the depot
"Ding, ding, ding," hear them ring
Soon it will be Christmas day

Window dressers to compete for "Best Dressed Window Display"
Saturday, December 2
8 p.m. award ceremony at Quinn's

Katherine and Bonnie Gordon add ornaments to a silver mid-century Christmas tree as they decorate their shop for the coming holiday. Awards will be given out on December 2 for the district's "Best Dressed Window Display."



Leaving display window lights on after hours pays off. Sparkling clean glass and accent lighting on the products say as much as a shopkeeper's happy smile when shoppers peek in at the products at Apotheke after dinner.

District's window of notoriety

One of the most scandalous photos of nineteenth century life at the depot showed the Ypsilanti Cornet Band in a circus-like wagon parked in front of what is today's BirdBrain world headquarters. In a third floor window, "Ma Bush," madame of the popular bordello above George W. Cady's Saloon at that address, was shown resting on the sill and waving to some of her customers on the street.

Their last names and four-digit phone numbers were penciled on the wall there, but have long since been painted over.

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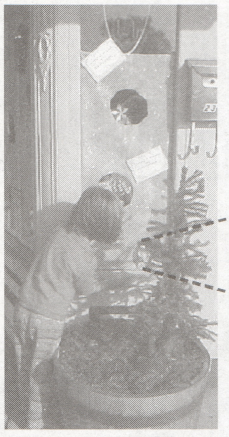

Teeny Weeny windows

The district's youngest window dresser, Bonnie Gordon examines "teeny weeny windows" in the side window at Mom & Dad's shop. Small vignettes are placed for the younger shoppers.

Grandparents may find as much fascination with the goodies in the window of Gordon's Five & Dime as the kids do. In addition to the wind-up toys, the candy brands found here take seniors back to a simple time they remember with joy. The candy flavor's the same; only the more secure wrapping is different. The times have certainly changed, but the flavor and brand logos live on at this unusual shop.

A window with secrets

Follett House's third floor ballroom is where Buffalo Bill brought his famous Wild West Show performance

"The secret window whence the world looks small and very dear." -Lepanto, *Lord Chesterton*

Richard Haas's "Depot Town Riddle," published in *The Rag* in 1986, told of school kids on Christmas vacation who discover a strange face in the window of the Follett House ballroom Twenty years later, many of those grown-up kids who read the story in their distant childhood say they still think they can see that face in the window when they go running or walking on the track at Frog Island.

The January/February *Rag*:

There's romance down at the depot.Wintertime dinners, drinks in front of the fireplace, walks in snowy parks, and other mushy stuff for your Valentine.

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 970235
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
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Email: depottown_events@yahoo.com
***Rag* editor:** thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Mary Decker, Vice President
Ray Strassel, Treasurer
Sandee French, Secretary & Past President
DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Harrington's Standard Printing, 120 East Cross.

Depot Town Association, Inc. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New or Renewal

Membership entitles you to:
- √ District email bulletins
- √ Link to DTA Website
- √ Discount for ElvisFest booth
- √ Discount for Heritage Festival booth
- √ Features in the *Depot Town Rag*

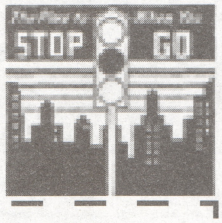
Regular annual membership: $50 **Life membership: $200**

Lifetime members get all correspondence and information on festivals from DTA emails.

Business name: _____
Owner's name: _____
Address (Street): _____
City: _____
State: _____ ZIP: _____
Phone: _____
Email Address: _____
Web Page Address: _____

Please make check payable to "Depot Town Association"

Now is the time to show support for your neighborhood association through your annual membership** (at left) **& your sponsoring ad** (at right) **in the almost-monthly neighborhood newsletter



MARKETING OPPORTUNITY

Advertise your business in the 2007 *Depot Town Rag*

Don't let your ad be mistaken for that auto tire company's promotion at some highway consumer discount mall

Keep it local

Your business-card-size ad of local goods and services placed among stories with an intensely local focus, random history and nostalgia, fierce neighbohoodliness, and editorial opinion revealing why we're so happy we are not doing business in a strip mall

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Intinerant window trimmers decorated local gas stations

Gas companies like Standard Oil, Pure, Shell, Sinclair, and Mobil had full-time regional employees whose job it was to create window designs at their company's gas stations. Just inside by the counter near the cigarette and candy display there were chairs where you could wait for your oil change or auto repair to be finished. A stack of well-read magazines was piled loosely on the ledge of the front window and the window's design was changed to fit the coming season.

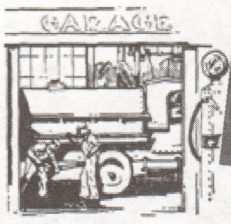
The gas company's trimmer parked his business coupe off to one side away from the pumps, and brought his sample case into the station. Most customers knew him because he'd been doing this window and others in town for years. First, he would rip down what was left of the previous display, wad up the crepe paper streamers, pull out the old staples, scrape the tape marks off the glass, and wash the fly specs off the window glass. Next step was to measure and mark his contact points for this season's design. Finally, he would open his magic case and kids marveled that it was not a sample case at all; it was as orderly as the family doctor's medical bag, but it held scissors, tape, thumb tacks, and giant rolls of crepe paper streamers.

If it was spring, his colors were pastel pinks, yellows, blues, and greens. Summer brought out the happy flower colors that didn't grow in all the urban concrete. Autumn, of course, featured browns, oranges, and yellows. In winter he carried reds, greens, and silver.

Long before the ubiquitous "happy face", design clichés like cupids, umbrellas, bunnies, snowflakes, and turkeys filled these graphic displays with each change of season.

Somehow, that gas station window guy was able to do so much more with the same kind of paper streamers we had used to decorate for a home birthday party or a school dance. He layered, twisted, and pulled those stretchy streamers into three-dimensional geometric patterns that amazed us and got us all thinking about being artists like him some day.

Watch for the efforts of Depot Town's window trimmers this month; they feature their products and services all year 'round, and they will appreciate your feedback.



Ring's gas station was at the site of today's Olde Towne Coin & Gold

It was a gas!

[station]

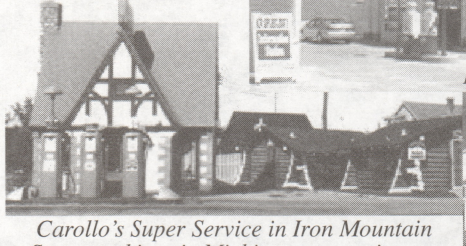
We had a lot of class... and it was all tourist

Watertown's Sinclair

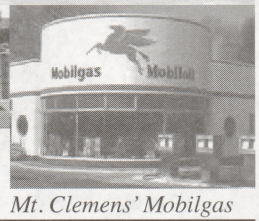
Olin "Olie" Ring ran the Sinclair station at the depot. In its later years, the sign had a picture of a dinosaur on it—a favorite of young children. Ring's beer outlet was in a lean-to-like structure to the west, hugging the side of today's Spa Burjon. The interior was made up mostly of beer coolers and Ring's is purported to have outsold all the other beer retail outlets in town.

Olie Ring was a notoriously fast driver and died in an auto accident on the way to his annual pilgrimage to the Indianapolis 500 one year.

Port Huron's Standard



Carollo's Super Service in Iron Mountain
See more historic Michigan gas stations at WaterWinterwonderland.com



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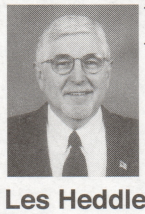
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"An honest Ale-house where we shall find a cleanly room, Lavender in the Windows, and twenty Ballads stuck about the wall."
-The Compleat Angler, *Izaak Walton*
Even the windows of the taverns
hold Christmas cheer in December.

In the days of the Purple Gang's rule in Detroit during Prohibition, sitting in the window of a bar or restaurant was a risky invitation to possible violent behavior—maybe even a shooting. In today's Depot Town—just a few miles down those same railroad tracks—the front booth window at the Sidetrack Bar & Grill is a great place to sit and be seen...and diners vie for that key location.

This table is one of several excellent train-watching spots for diners. Art experts say they use these key vantage points to watch for unique graffitti on passing box cars.

But shootings? Not to worry; folks will only shoot you a *smile* or a *wave* as they greet you from the sidewalk. We may look like the old times, but we've cleaned up.

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and the River Street Bakery
312 North River
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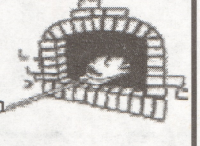
734-483-1520
Fresh Bread in the tradition of hearth baked artisan breads available Monday Wednesday and Friday evenings



Cady's Grill & Bar
A New Dining Experience!
new menu ▪ superb collection of wines
36 E. Cross Street ▪ 483-2800
10% off your entire meal

RAGTIME
Coming events

Christmas Bazaar
Saturday, December 2 • 9 am-3 pm
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
120 North Huron Street • Ypsilanti
www.stlukesypsi.org

MOONLIGHT MAGIC
Friday, December 8
w/ specials all weekend
Sales in the shops
Open late • Street Singers

Best Dressed Window Contest judging
Saturday, December 2
Award Ceremony
8 p.m. @ Quinn's Essentials

Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels

HOLIDAY HOME TOUR
4 houses & new EMU Student Center
Saturday, 2 December
7-10 p.m. CANDLELIGHT TOUR $30
8-10 p.m. hors d'oeuvres/dessert reception
@ Ladies' Literary Club
All food donated by Trader Joe's
Sunday, 3 December
12-5:30 p.m DAYTIME TOUR $15
Tickets: Mantis Garden & Pet Supplies, Quinn's Essentials, Haab's Restaurant, Eleven West & Katherine Rose in Belleville

December 31
Southeast Michigan's
New Year Jubilee
family entertainment at dozens of locations in Depot Town and downtown

Little lamps in shop windows help to tell our story after hours

"I cleaned the windows and I swept the floor
And I polished up the handle
of the big front door.
I polished up that handle so care-ful-lee that
Now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!"
-H.M.S. Pinafore, *William Schenck Gilbert*

Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta character must have known what good maintenance and clever decorating can get you. Many shops at the depot thoughtfully take time to show off their goods and services to the sidewalk after their closing hours.

One of the simplest window trimming techniques is to light up the merchandise with tasteful lamps designed for the home. Many of them are on timers, adjusted to show their stuff to tomorrow's shoppers as they walk to their cars after the dinner hour when some shops may be closed.

Aside from the satisfaction of a window trimming job well done, look at the military promotion that resulted to the subject of Gilbert & Sullivan's famous operetta!

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